

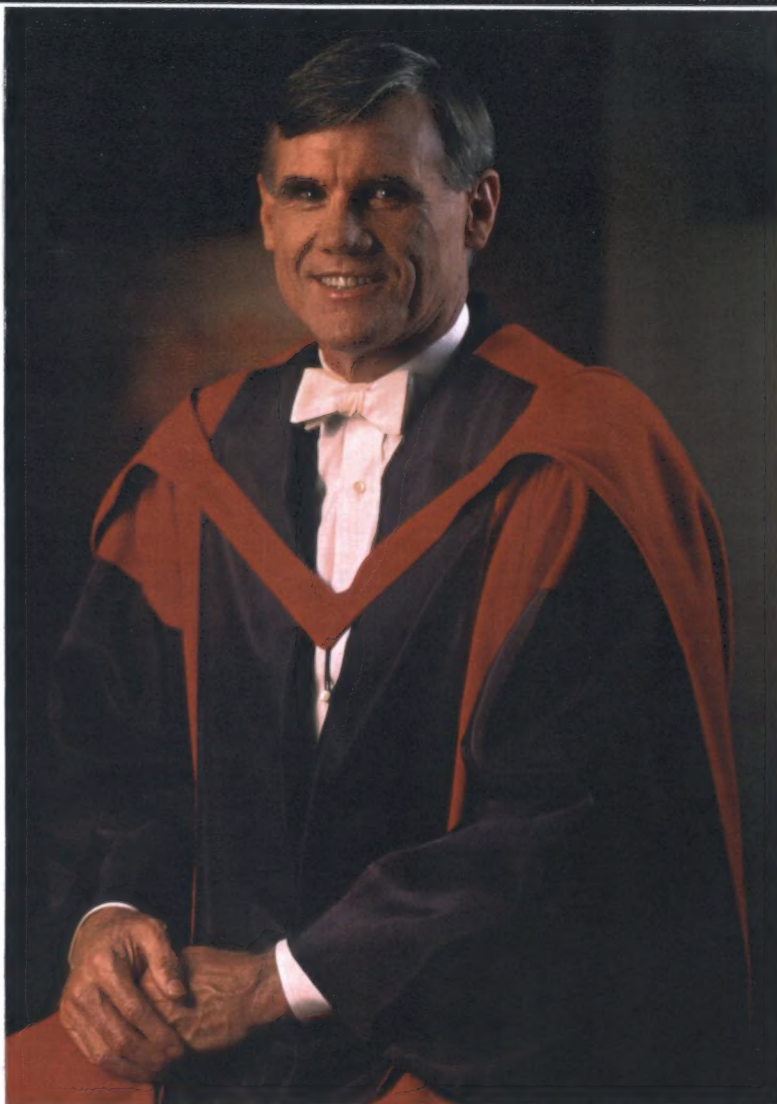
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Dr. Douglas D. Paschall

Patrick Wilson Library  
Montgomery Bell Academy  
Nashville, Tennessee

## Reverend Peerman's Sermon

### Dr. Paschall: A Gift from His Heart of Gratitude

Most of you here today have known Douglas Paschall far longer than I. Although we had met socially, it was not until August that we came to know each other on a more intimate level. It was then that Douglas called to begin the planning for this service. I must acknowledge to you that I feel much in need of Douglas' own singular eloquence to do justice to what it was like talking with him about the character of the service he wanted for this day.

Douglas said at the outset that he wanted the primary note for us in remembering his life to be one of gratitude. With a deeply reflective calm, he said that he felt grateful for his life, that for him it had come whole. We agreed that gratitude should be the heart of this service, but I somewhat gingerly suggested to him that there would be another note present alongside gratitude today, and that would be sorrow. And he was silent, and thought for a while, and then began quietly to weep. "Of course you're right," he said. "People will need to be sad." It moved him deeply to think that we would miss him.

In several conversations our talk ranged over some of the literature that had gone to the marrow of his bones. Lear and Hamlet and Job and Oedipus. What came through in listening to him was how deep his learning had gone. Sitting with him at the end of his days there was a luminous compassion in Douglas, compassion for all of us who must make choices out of partial knowledge and live and suffer out of partial knowledge, and yet perhaps even discover, as Douglas clearly did, a kind of paradoxical wholeness right in the middle of apparent incompleteness. I saw that Douglas had won through to mercy for himself and for the rest of us "mortal critters," as he called us. This mercy, this paradoxical wholeness, this luminous compassion, when you are in its precincts, you know that you are on holy ground. You are in the presence of the great I AM, the Lord and Giver of Life.

Douglas chose the readings for this service, and he confessed with a laugh that he'd had to read most of the Old Testament to be sure exactly what he wanted, though he'd skipped some of the tedious parts. From the New Testament he chose the parable of the Good Samaritan, which I've not before heard read at a funeral. This parable, like so many of Jesus', contains a great reversal of expectation. Jesus' listeners, after hearing of a priest and a Levite passing by the wounded man, would have expected one like themselves, an ordinary person without religious rank, to have rendered compassionate aid. But Jesus tells them, no, it was a Samaritan who bore the man succor. To his listeners, a Samaritan would have been the archetype of corruption, his listener's mortal enemy.

Why did Douglas choose the parable of the Good Samaritan for this service? He told me that he wanted to preach to you, albeit subtly, about the mercy of God which knows no limit, which

is always showing up in the most unexpected, and we might think, corrupting places. And I think, although he would not say this, because Douglas knew himself to be a wounded, if greatly gifted, man to whom the mercy of God had come to carry him to a place of rest.

Our conversation on one visit moved to a new book we had both read, called *A Whole New Life*, by Douglas' friend Reynolds Price. Like Douglas, Reynolds Price is a teacher of English literature, a Rhodes scholar, a writer of exceptional gifts. And like Douglas, in his early fifties, Reynolds Price found himself confronting a devastating illness.

On the other side of a grim struggle with a spinal tumor which left him paraplegic, Douglas' friend has written a dispatch from the war that was his illness. In retrospect, he says that after his initial treatments, the kindest thing that anyone could have said to him, would have been something like, "Reynolds Price, you're dead. Who are you going to be tomorrow? Who can you be and how can you get there, double-time?"

Sooner or later, all of us, like Douglas Paschall and Reynolds Price, in one form or another, will come to see that an old life is dead. However we negotiate the anxiety and despair that inevitably attend the ending of an old life, this transformation from an old life to a new one, is a nontransferable experience. No one can manage our transformation for us, however blessed with irreplaceable helpers we may be along the way. What marked Douglas' own particular transformation and how he handled it, his graciousness and his resoluteness, is now a part of the lives of all of us who have witnessed this transformation. This remarkable teacher, who made many lives better by his living, taught us most eloquently by the dying that was a part of his life.

The piece of this service in which Douglas was most interested is the music that will follow. Douglas wanted some part of this service which would be unhurried, something not typically predictable at a funeral, a space in which one might be "contemplative," as he put it, to listen to whatever might come from the center of one's heart. He chose for us a movement from a Beethoven string quartet, No. 13 in Bb Major, Opus 130. From this greatly gifted man comes a gift from his heart of gratitude for his life all it was, all it shall be. We agreed that this music should be something sacramental, something that would give expression to what we call holy, the merciful and compassionate presence of God. As we talked it reminded me of Jesus' own departing gift to his disciples. "My peace I leave with you," he said. "My own peace I leave with you." I think Douglas wanted to leave us some of the peace he had found. What better gift could he have left us?



The Reverend Dr. C. Gordon Peerman III  
26 December 1994



## Remarks on Dr. Paschall's Life

### Ridley Wills Reflects on Dr. Paschall's Legacy

On the several occasions in 1988 when a few MBA trustees met with Douglas Paschall in Nashville and once in his office at the University of the South, I never remember his speaking about his qualifications for the headmastership at MBA. I do recall his telling me that his wife, Rosie, was the best art teacher in the United States. Nevertheless, Douglas was clear about why he was interested in MBA. He said that he felt that, at a school like MBA, he would have a greater opportunity to impact the lives of young people than he would have if he continued to teach somewhat older young men and women at the university level. How prophetic that statement was.

When Brad Gioia and I spoke to reporters over the weekend about Douglas Paschall's legacies at MBA, we gave almost identical answers. One was that he led the school community to embrace a very significant academic expansion into the areas of fine arts, music, and drama. The other is that he taught his students not only to be scholars, athletes, and gentleman, but to have tolerance and compassion for others. Douglas knew before he died how extraordinarily well he succeeded in accomplishing his goals.

One of the gifts of this renaissance man was his ability to relate to his students; he knew them all by name, he knew about their failures and successes, and he was always there to encourage them as they performed in the classroom, on the football field, and in the theater. They knew he loved them, and, in turn, they respected and loved him, never more so than since November of last year when Dr. Paschall told them in assembly that he had an incurable cancer. During the last half of the 1993-1994 school year, he continued to be the same articulate and effective teacher, headmaster, and role model they had always known. Just as he had taught students how to live for twenty-four years, his last contribution was to teach his students how to die.

Because of the enormous impact that Douglas Paschall had on the lives of so many young men, many of them wrote him this

fall when he was confined to bed. On two occasions, when I visited with Douglas, he showed me letters, which were particularly meaningful to him. I want to share one with you this morning. It is from the mother of a young student who came to MBA from a public elementary school. When I asked her if I might read it today, she said that she would consider it an honor. Here is the letter, which brought tears to Douglas' eyes when he read it.

Dear Dr. Paschall,

Please allow me to express in writing to you how very wonderfully, and radically in my eyes, you have affected my son and me, since we met you. That was a year ago, at the 1993 November Admission Open House, when you spoke about your philosophy for the school in a way that reassured me. I felt apprehensive, but you dispelled my apprehensions---and as a result, my son is now a seventh grader and a very happy one indeed. In just these few weeks since he began at MBA, I have seen his self-esteem, and his pride in self and school, soar.

To my amazement, he says that his aim and dream is to be a Rhodes scholar at Oxford! I hope you will know that---even though it may forever remain a dream, not fact---it is because of you he dreams it.

Sincerely yours,  
A Seventh Grade Parent

Letters like this one confirm what all of us, who have been privileged to know and treasure Douglas Paschall, already knew---that he was a magnificent man who gave fully of himself. Let me read one of Douglas' favorite lines from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* Act 5 scene 1.

"The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance."

Douglas Paschall led an amazingly productive life---teaching and being involved with young people and their development. His life was truly one of virtue.

### This Instant

Fred and Ted Callahan

While MBA's history spans two centuries, its remarkable recent development is due to its past Headmaster, Dr. Douglas Paschall. He articulated a vision of intellectual growth to expand his concept of scholastic community. In many public forums he would work the theme to this topic. He said that the recognition of individual excellence did not detract from celebration of all in the community. Knowing that mastery would come from submission to academic studies, he suggested that everyone submit to such disciplines. For in his personal submission to literature, he had been liberated. He spoke specifically on this liberation last spring at the Father-Son banquet: Dr. Paschall reflected on poetry and recited Keats' "To Autumn." He explained how the first and second stanzas describe the richness of fruit as it grows and its subsequent harvesting. In the third stanza, Keats queries "where are the Songs of spring?" It seemed that Dr. Paschall spoke of himself, "Where is my youth, my health?" His answer was in each student's MBA experience. This experience was so meaningful to him that he gave his last year to the students of Montgomery Bell. He wanted "to take this instant in absolute pleasure."

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When critics of diversity indulged in righteous "I told you so," he responded with the need for our community to celebrate and respect our differences at the same time that the community works to grow in its breadth and outlook. He knew that upon closest inspection our differences become microscopic and that only through community might MBA become the place in Nashville that "every boy would want to attend, though not everyone could." As we release this man, we seize his vision and insure that his voice is sounded in our actions and thoughts. Since all of us must some day leave this community, we hope to have also treasured its past, enlarged its presence and guaranteed its future. Empowered with Dr. Paschall's spirit, our works shall accomplish this..

Carefully scripting his own service, Dr. Paschall strove to mitigate the congregation's pain. He selected readings and met numerous times with Reverend Peerman about the content of the sermon. Following the sermon, Beethoven's thirteenth string concerto in B<sup>b</sup> major Opus 130 was played: to allow the congregation a chance to take even this instant, the surrendering of the man, in contemplation.

## Students, Faculty, and Friends' Reflections

You feel two and half feet taller after having met him. He truly believed that you were a unique person, no matter who you were or what you had done.

George Washington felt that leaders should stand above the everyday fray of things and lead with fairness and direction. This is exactly how Dr. Paschall led MBA.

He lived the life that people can only hope for. That ideal life we dream of; he lived.

He was the only person who could talk football one minute and the next describe the intricacies of Michelangelo.

His unparalleled zest for living came out in his teaching.

Although Dr. Paschall frequently led by his powerful well-chosen words, it was his example that made others proud to follow him. Fundamentally a teacher, he had the engaging qualities---an attentive gaze, an understanding presence, and a hearty laugh---that made others trust his counsel and seek to emulate his virtues. Even after students had left him, they carried with them a self-esteem made possible by an awareness of his own great accomplishments.

Knowing that a single man can make his mark, he asked us to rise to our individual tasks and contribute in our own ways. "Don't try to be me; only I can be me," he said. "Be who you're supposed to be."

For all of his wonderful talents and accomplishments, it was the grace with which he carried himself and treated others that was a delight. His kindness was a striking example.

The most personally kind person I know. He was extremely thoughtful about small details to make others feel comfortable.

He was a teacher through and through, constantly seeking to engage, challenge, and make students think in different ways. Undoubtedly, part of this came from his understanding of the role of the arts, which was so great. . .

Beyond the intellect, he was always willing to give. He looked for the worth of every individual. This genuine love for learning and people came through in his teaching.

He accomplished more in fifty years than I could hope to do in one hundred.

Last year, Dr. Paschall would randomly drop in and look at and praise our art. His support for the arts is a rarity---you won't find it in any other school in Nashville.

I remember asking him what my salutatory was to be about. "What was the speech about last year?" he returned. "I don't know" was my reply. "Precisely."



Dr. and Mrs. Paschall share a laugh after graduation.

December 23, 1994

Dear Rosie, Rachel, and Andrew-

Though I have known for some time this day would come, I am so sad and so sorry to see Doug go.

From the days of our first meeting in Oxford, I always felt a special bond with him and loved being with him.

If ever a man was more than the sum of his parts, it was Doug. He was a fine athlete, a great scholar, and he looked like a movie star, but no one could ever resent him. His hearty laugh, dancing eyes, constant concern for others lifted all of us who were fortunate enough to be his friends.

I will always be grateful for the good time we shared as young men, the good advice he gave, the profound impact he had on his students, the wonderful visit we all had when your family came to stay with us at the White House, and most of all, for the enduring strength, reassurance, and joy of his friendship.

Now we all wish there had been more years, but what a life he had, by the grace of God, and has still, in God's embrace.

Sincerely

BILL CLINTON

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